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ABSTRACT

Following a national trend, school board members, administrators, and teachers in Brandon, Vermont, have developed a model for a standards-based evaluation and compensation system for teachers that does not link test scores to teacher pay. The model was developed over a period of 4 years, a necessary amount of time to establish guiding principles, affirm commitment from administrators and teachers, and translate a plan into acceptable contract language. Under the new standards-based environment, teachers present a professional portfolio, which mirrors the state's relicensing criteria, to a "moveover" committee made up of board members, administrators, and peers. The portfolio includes evaluations, evidence of meeting state standards, and a professional growth plan. All new teachers are compensated through the new system; senior teachers can choose the new system or the traditional salary system based on longevity and graduate credits. The new compensation system is managed by the personnel officer in each school. After the first year in place, the portfolio presentation was refined because teachers needed guidance in writing reflective narratives. After 2 years, early implementation, though not seamless, has been smooth because of the consistency of the moveover committees and the mature leadership of school board members, administrators, and teachers. (WFA)

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# The Implementation and Early Findings from a Professional Development and Performance Based Teacher Compensation System

ED 467 668

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## I. Introduction

There has been an increasing interest in alternative teacher compensation plans and proposals across the nation. The traditional salary matrix, based on longevity and graduate credits, has been criticized for having only a tenuous link with student learning. The National Commission on Teaching and America's Future called on districts and states to better link teacher pay with teacher capabilities. Everyone knows of an exceptional teacher's caring for students, fine teaching and contributions to the school. They also know these good works often go unrecognized and unrewarded. Citizens anecdotally point to another teacher who apparently manifests little commitment and note that both are paid on the same basis. Seeing some truth in these concerns, the Rutland Northeast Supervisory Union teachers, administrators and board members addressed this issue.

Neither school boards nor teachers opposed paying people for extra contributions or above average performance, they just needed to have a way to do it fairly and honestly. A critical first step was that teachers and board members studied alternative pay schemes around the nation before moving forward. They found that tying pay to achievement test scores does not account for the different levels of students, and teacher testing doesn't separate good teachers from bad. Rutland Northeast wanted to avoid the harmful effects of these types of failed plans.

As teachers and board members sat down to work, they had three critical advantages. First, despite hard times in earlier negotiations, both board and teacher leadership had matured. All looked to the good of children and sought to avoid negotiations conflict. Second, Vermont supervisory union structures have

lent themselves to true site-based governance. In Rutland Northeast, each school has its own locally elected school board with complete budget and personnel authority. This means that decision making is nearby, personal and responsive. Third, small districts, population sparseness and the cultural climate of Vermont discourage the confrontational and formalized processes often seen in other settings.

## II. Building a Standards Based Evaluation and Compensation System

Tying teacher pay to school goals was first raised in labor negotiations in 1996. Yet, developing such a complex and new system within the context of labor negotiations proved unsuccessful. Although bargaining was collaborative, the negotiators were under timeline pressures and a multitude of traditional contract articles had to be resolved. A more freewheeling, open-ended and brainstorming environment was needed. Likewise, critical points sometimes required extensive and exhaustive work over many sessions.

It took four years from initial discussions to formal agreement. While this may seem a long time, it was this "make haste slowly" mentality that resulted in a six -to -one ratification vote by the teachers.

Year One: Initial Concepts - As part of the negotiated agreement, the *Teacher Compensation Committee* was formed and a philosophical framework was established. In a statement of principles included in the negotiated Master Agreement, the plan had to be fair, equitable, financially competitive, and financially stable over time. It also had to encourage professional growth, pedagogical improvements, intellectual achievements, and contributions to school goals.

Year Two: Early Explorations - After essential principles were defined, the study committee hit a stumbling block. Philosophical differences, apprehension, the press of other demands, inadequate infrastructure, and insufficient knowledge and understanding all stood in the way. In short, the commitment was not yet ripe particularly among the teachers. At the end of year two, the negotiation teams revisited the topic, recognized the failed efforts and renewed their commitment.

Year Three: Plan Development and Presentation - The renewed group (with many new members) established a calendar of meetings and tasks, reviewed the literature, studied reasons for successes and failures, and considered the local culture. This group developed and presented its report to the school boards and teacher associations at the end of year three. Both groups positively received and endorsed the Report of the Teacher Compensation Committee (1999).

Year Four: Hammering Out Contract Language - Once the model had been designed and approved, the plan was turned over to the negotiations committees to translate into contract language. As is often the case, unanticipated trouble spots were found. In particular, changes to the teacher evaluation model were greater than expected. Not surprisingly, the supervision and evaluation system was not strong enough to be used in what the teachers rightfully saw as a "high stakes" program. The teacher team members were authorized by their membership to proceed but if they were seen as going too far, they could incite a backlash and cause rejection of the plan. Over several months, with sweeping revisions offered by both sides, the plan was translated into acceptable contract language.

For teachers and school boards to simply sit down together and talk about these issues was an achievement. To reach an agreement was exceptional. There were a number of key process factors:

• Leadership maturity - Both the teacher and board teams were leaders. They constantly held to the higher purpose of educating children. Both the teacher and board groups weeded out uncompromising team members.

• Tenacity - Team leaders simply would not let the momentum ooze away. Meetings were held, homework was completed, and steady progress was pushed at every step.

• Continuity - Overlap in the study teams and negotiations teams allowed the process to flow smoothly from one step to the next.

• Joint Presentations - The recommendations were presented by school board members and teachers working together. For both teams, the participants were respected members of their groups.

## III. Linking Teacher Compensation to School and District Goals: Teachers' Professional Portfolios

At the heart of the system are the "salary column moveover" criteria. The salary matrix remained in a traditional format with salary steps granted for years of service and number of graduate credits/ degrees. Teachers with lesser credentials would face a salary cap unless they moved over into a new column.

What changed was how teachers moved from column to column. As contrasted with adding up the necessary number of graduate credits; teachers must now present their professional portfolio to a board/ teacher/ administrator

move-over committee for approval. The organization of this portfolio mirrors the state's relicensing criteria and includes:

• Annual professional growth plans - Within the portfolio, teachers must submit their annual growth plans for the preceding years. Annual plans must be approved by the supervisor at the beginning of the year and address what the teacher will do to advance school and district learning goals. An end of year evaluation of actual accomplishments is also a required part of the plan.

• Evaluations - Summative evaluation reports and classroom observations are included in the portfolio. Performance evaluations not only include the act of teaching, they also include maintaining a positive learning environment, working with others in professional responsibilities and how the teacher contributed significantly to school goals and activities.

• Evidence of state standards - Minimum clock hour requirements are specified in each of the areas of learning, professional knowledge, colleagueship, advocacy, and accountability. Teachers may concentrate in one or more of these areas depending upon their specialty, skills, special talents and desires. These concentrations add "elective" hours to the teachers' plan.

• Expanding and encouraging professional growth - The way in which requirements could be met was expanded. A combination of courses, workshops, district curriculum work, collaboration, enrichment, national certification, serving as mentors or peer coaches, public engagement, enhancing social and personal health of students, and a host of like areas were encouraged -- provided they advanced school and district goals.

The Role of Test Scores - Vermont requires each school to establish growth targets in achievement test scores. In Rutland Northeast, teachers are not

held responsible for specific standardized test score gains; however, their contributions to improving student learning are important. Working with colleagues on updating curriculum, realigning their own curriculum, improving instruction and contributing to the growth of the school are all recognized in the compensation plan. Boards and teachers concluded that direct links of achievement test scores to teacher pay have proven the Achilles heel of alternate compensation schemes. Thus, they avoided them.

Transition provisions - All new teachers are compensated through the performance compensation system. Senior teachers may choose to enter the new system or continue under the old system. However, once they elect to change to the new system, they cannot return to the old system. As an incentive, the new system offers a broader range of professional development and salary advancement opportunities that are attractive to senior teachers.

## IV. The Move-Over Review Panel

Moving from column to column is based on both qualitative and quantitative criteria. Neither the teachers nor the board wished to move from a strictly quantitative (graduate credits) system to a completely qualitative or subjective system. Consequently, as noted above, minimum hours of work are required in each area. Nevertheless, the move-over review panel must still make a qualitative determination as to whether the activities advanced school and district goals.

A pool of panel members, who serve staggered terms, exists at any given time. For each teacher's portfolio review, a school board member and a teachers' association representative are drawn by lottery. The teacher's principal also sits on the panel.

Like any group that makes qualitative judgements, they must calibrate their judgements through joint training. One group cannot be seen as overly lax and another as overly rigorous. Consequently, extensive training sessions are held with all judges and alternates during the fall before the portfolios are received. With two years of applied experience, actual portfolios are used as training materials. After the teacher portfolios are received on January 1 and reviewed by the judges, additional training and calibration sessions are held. This gives the judges an opportunity to discuss and resolve real issues rather than theoretical ones. As Odden, et. al. (2001) have noted, an adjustment mechanism is essential.

An appeal panel is provided if the teacher fails to be approved for a salary moveover. If the teacher chooses to appeal, a new panel is drawn by lottery with the superintendent's representative taking the place of the building principal. This new panel reviews the portfolio *de novo* and does not know the reason for the initial rejection.

All teachers and board members who serve in the pool, along with the superintendent's designee, are specifically empowered in the labor agreement to meet and resolve any outstanding issues that may arise in the implementation of the process. At the conclusion of the annual cycle, the entire group meets together to document new issues and concerns and adjust the procedures as needed.

## V. Supervision and Evaluation Models

All too frequently, elegantly designed teacher evaluation systems are adopted that outrun the school's capabilities to implement and maintain such labor-intensive enterprises. Evaluation specialists develop long lists of essential

teacher characteristics with rubrics for observing, assessing, classifying and reporting on these characteristics. At the same time, rigorous evaluation protections are built into union contracts, law and state regulations.

While these and other such models serve as excellent sets of procedures, they fall prey to the demands of time. Principals, with good intentions, have too many teachers to evaluate, are distracted by the issue of the hour, and are asked to rate more dimensions than they can observe. While teachers deserve feedback, the sheer volume makes these systems laborious and difficult (if not impossible) to operate. Few districts can politically or economically afford to hire sufficient administrative staff to properly run their evaluation programs.

Recognizing this problem, teachers and board members worked around it by:

- Setting the observations of proven teachers at one per year.
- Increasing the importance of the individual's goal setting and self-assessment activities. An annual growth plan with short pre- and post-conferences is a requirement for all teachers.
- Streamlining and clearly defining the extended supervision and evaluation of teachers in their first two years of service. This coincided with the new state law on probationary teachers and is also good practice.
- Encouraging mentoring and peer coaching apart from the formal evaluation process.
- Simplifying improvement recommendations while retaining more intense supervision and evaluation for low-performing teachers.
- Allowing checklists in areas not needing improvements.

Nevertheless, the supervision and evaluation process was still found to impose an unrealistic burden on school level administrators. Consequently, at the

end of the first full implementation year (2000-01), the judges recommended and the unions and boards subsequently changed the evaluation process. Summative evaluations would henceforth be done only every other year for teachers who had successfully completed three years of work experience and who were not on an improvement plan or on probation.

As noted earlier, many teacher evaluation systems focus strictly on the act of teaching. However, poor teacher performance is often for reasons other than pedagogy -- poor relationships with students and adults being the most frequent problem. Consequently, explicit evaluation criteria include positive learning environments; collegial and professional relations, positive problem resolution and the like have been made an explicit part of the models. This is a significant and essential component of the Supervision and Evaluation Models.

Teacher evaluations are placed on the table as part of the teacher's move-over portfolio. Of course, proficient teaching performance is essential. However, it is the broadly conceived contributions of the teacher to school goals and improvement that are key to salary advancement.

## VI. Factors Leading to Successful Program Adoption

The earlier noted team characteristics of leadership, tenacity, continuity, and joint presentations deserve emphasis. Just as important, in examining the successes and failures of others through the work of Carolyn Kelley (1995) and Allan Odden (1997), the teachers and boards adopted essential features:

- All teachers can participate - Salary advancement is not limited to a few.

• Professional development is broadly defined - A range of activities count toward salary advancement. Teachers can individually tailor their professional work. The key is a demonstrable linkage to school learning goals.

• Group activities count - In school-wide reform and with external accountability models, working together for school goals is important. Curriculum and instructional leadership is rewarded.

• Sufficient development and implementation time - The four-year process may seem long to policy makers wanting instant results. It takes this long. Further, the new contract is for five years, which allows time to workout the inevitable glitches.

• Administrative capability -- The leadership maturity of boards and teachers was noted earlier. However, both teachers and boards took into account the maturity and capabilities of the principals to fairly operate the system.

• Local culture and synergy - The plan fit the context, history, and traditions of the teachers and boards. It recognized the needs of veteran staff and the requirements of the district's curriculum work. School strategic plans and assessment systems were integrated. Improvements to the teacher portfolio system and the teacher evaluation system were folded-in. The various systems were merged.

## VII. Early Implementation Findings

Linking teacher pay to teacher performance is still in its infancy. In the first year of implementation (2000-2001), about 9% of the faculty notified the central office by the November 15 deadline that they wished to advance under the new system. When the due date of January 1 arrived, 6% actually submitted their portfolios. An additional 6% of senior teachers moved over under the

grandfathered system. Compared to the previous two years, moveovers under both the traditional and portfolio systems showed a sharp increase in the first implementation year. Most of the portfolio moveovers were veteran teachers and it appeared that there was some level of pent-up demand.

In the second year (2001-2002), however, the percentage notifying that they wished to move forward under the old system dropped off sharply. Portfolio or merit movement stayed at the same level as the previous year. Thus, relatively speaking, the proportion of teachers opting for the new system increased.

In the first year, three-fourths of the applicants presenting portfolios were required to "revise" their portfolio before it could be accepted. In the second year, the revision percentage fell to 15%. As part of our first year summary and evaluation meeting, we found that teachers needed guidance and direction in writing their reflective narratives. The drop in revision requirements in year two is due to special training sessions provided by the Curriculum Director.

After the first year, the expectations became more clearly defined and precise. This information was then reduced to written materials and shared with all teachers seeking to develop and submit a portfolio.

In the first year, one applicant failed and was unsuccessful on appeal. In the second year, two applicants failed and one of these is still on appeal as of this writing.

In the Rutland Northeast model, the consistency of the salary move-over committees over the first two years has been excellent and the system is operationalized. The Personnel Officer runs the system with strong training support provided by the Curriculum and Staff Development Director.

While the performance of the system over the long term is yet to be seen, early implementation has been smooth and cooperative among boards, teachers and administrators. While the socioeconomic characteristics of the district range

from poverty to affluence, academic test scores have continued to improve above the national and regional averages over the past four years. However, we can make no causal linkage between this program and the improving achievement pattern.

A standards based environment, the requirement that all children learn, and an ever changing and more complex curriculum all tell us that traditional compensation systems are no longer appropriate. Only recently have national teacher leaders joined school board leaders in calling for new models of compensating teachers. Systems based on advancing school and district goals without tying either schools or teachers to specific test score gains opens new territories and opportunities to answer this important need.

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# Move-over Data
## 1998 - 2002
as of 3/27/02

| Year | Total # of teachers | Notified traditional | Traditional That moved | Notified PGP | Presented Portfolio | PDP moved w/o revision | Move-over w/revisions | Failed Move-over | Appealed | Won Appeal | Lost Appeal |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1998-99 | 207 | 16 | 8 | | | | | | | | |
| 1999-00 | 207 | 19 | 6 | | | | | | | | |
| 2000-01 | 203 | 17 | 13 | 18 | 12 | 2 | 9 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| 2001-02 | 203 | 12 | 1 so far | 18 | 14 | 9 | 1 so far | 2 | 1 | | |

# TIMELINE FOR PORTFOLIO COMPENSATION PROCESS

| | |
|---|---|
| September | Schools are sent notice to contact Personnel Officer or Principal if interested in Information packet for Move-over. Sample portfolios are sent to librarians for candidates to review. |
| September - October | Workshops are held on reflective writing. |
| October | Informational Meeting is held for anyone interested in the Portfolio Compensation process. |
| November 15 | Professional staff must notify Superintendent their intent to move over. |
| December | A training session is held for teachers, board members and principals serving on the judging panels. |
| January 1 | Professional staff must submit portfolio to Superintendent. |
| January (mid to late) | A second training session is held to calibrate rubric using actual portfolios. |
| February - March | Presentations are scheduled. Candidates are notified the outcome of their move-over within one week of presentation. If revisions are required, they have one month to submit revisions. If move-over is denied, they can appeal decision. All move-overs should be decided by mid-April. |
| May | Meeting is held with judging panels to discuss and revise portfolio requirements and process. |
| June - July | New information packets are developed reflecting any changes to Portfolio requirements and process. |

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